

# Community Assessments:

## Engaging the Public in Public Health Policy

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# What is the State Board of Health?

Established in Washington State Constitution

10 members, 9 appointed by Governor  
1 the DOH Secretary

Responsibilities:      Rule making  
                                 Policy Development  
                                 Public Engagement

# SBOH policy development work

SBOH identifies priority areas every 2 years

- Past priority: Environmental Justice

SBOH EJ Committee: Carl Osaki & Joe Finkbonner

- Present priority: Environmental Health

SBOH EH Committee: Carl Osaki

# Past SBOH Environmental Justice work

Identified that communities impacted by environmental health issues wanted:

- More meaningful involvement in government processes
- Better interagency coordination within their communities

# Current SBOH Environmental Health work

- Follows up on past environmental justice work
- Collect information on local, state, and federal community assessment processes used to identify, prioritize, and resolve environmental health issues

## Objectives:

1. Identify models and processes used
2. Identify key participants in processes
3. Understand interactions between different agencies and community groups
4. Recommend how to improve agency coordination and community engagement

# What is community assessment?

*...both a product and a process*

*...a systematic way of identifying the needs and resources of a community by*

*gathering statistical data,  
soliciting perspectives of community members, and  
collecting information about service providers and  
other community resources*

-- Community Assessment Handbook, City of Calgary

([www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/community/publications/cmtyassesshandbook/cdasses1.html](http://www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/community/publications/cmtyassesshandbook/cdasses1.html))

# Examples of different community assessments

- Community themes and strengths assessment
    - identifies community perceptions, interests, priorities and assets
  - Local public health system assessment
    - measures the capacity and performance
  - Forces of change assessment
    - identifies forces that are or will be affecting the community or local public health system
  - Community health status assessment
    - assesses data about health status, quality of life, and risk factors
- Mobilizing for Action Through Planning and Partnerships, NACCHO  
([http://mapp.naccho.org/MAPP\\_Home.asp](http://mapp.naccho.org/MAPP_Home.asp))

# Why do community assessments?

- *Assist in establishing community priorities and developing action plans*
- *Address a particular problem that has arisen in the community*
- *Assist in the allocation of funding and other resources*
- *Inform elected officials and members of organizations serving the community*
- *Collect data to support actions to address systemic inequities*
- *Enhance community organization by developing indigenous leadership, strengthening community participation and forging community consensus*

-- Community Assessment Handbook, City of Calgary

([www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/community/publications/cmtyassesshandbook/cdasses2.html](http://www.gov.calgary.ab.ca/community/publications/cmtyassesshandbook/cdasses2.html))



# Why work with other agencies, organizations, and individuals?

*While public health agencies may bear responsibility for leading community health improvement efforts, their success hinges on their ability to establish and maintain effective partnerships.*

*The public health agency needs to identify and work with all entities that influence community health – from other governmental agencies to businesses to not-for-profit organizations to the general citizenry.*

-- Healthy People 2010 Toolkit

(<http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/state/toolkit/default.htm>)

# Why work with other agencies, organization, and individuals?

*Community partners can:*

*Advocate for the goals and objectives of the state plan  
in the community and recruit other partners*

*Contribute particular skills and talents*

*Help monitor progress and achieve objectives*

-- Healthy People 2010 Toolkit

(<http://www.health.gov/healthypeople/state/toolkit/default.htm>)

## Back to the SBOH EH work plan:

- Collect information on local, state, and federal community assessment processes used to identify, prioritize, and resolve environmental health issues

Step 1: group interviews with local health department staff doing community assessments

Participants: 9 in Eastern Washington group  
7 in Western Washington group

from small to large local health departments

Plus one person who emailed answers to questions

## Community assessment group interview results:

- Most LHDs environmental health (EH) department staff don't do formal community assessments, although some of their activities are essentially community assessment.
- There is little collaboration between EH staff and community assessment staff.
- There are very few EH questions included in community assessments.
- Most EH department staff do not have the funding, time, or training to do community assessments.

## Community assessment group interview results:

- EH priorities are determined primarily by regulations, and by local boards of health, outbreaks, trends in the media, and “squeaky wheel” concerns.
- EH staff know specific agencies and organizations to involve in EH issues, and engage these agency and community partners on an issue-specific basis.
- Most community assessment staff use their knowledge of the community to identify community partners and stakeholders.

## Community assessment group interview results:

- One LHD has used formal models to structure their community assessment processes, identify and engage community partners.
- Most community assessment staff use surveys, often the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, to do community assessments.
- Other tools used include the *Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE-EH)*, a community health advisory board, epidemiological assessment methods, and interviews.

## Group interview participants' recommendations to improve community involvement in community assessment processes:

- Use interdisciplinary teams of health department staff and community members to do assessments. Share skills, community contacts, and resources.
- Build engagement of community members and organizations into our assessment processes.
- Train EH and other program staff in community assessment methods and processes.
- Use language that is meaningful and make information understandable and accessible to community members.

## More recommendations from group interview participants:

- Fund community assessments and solutions to problems identified in community assessments.
- Encourage public health leadership to promote community assessment.
- Leadership is needed to develop “bigger EH policy,” focusing on prevention as well as mandated activities.
- Respect the communities we serve and learn about their culture, concerns and strengths.